



# Building Your *Dream Mothership*

WRITTEN BY ROD SILVA

Everyone has a different definition of what the boating dream is. To some it means going out on the weekends when the weather is fair. To others it means having a floating condo where they can entertain family and friends. Some prefer to make their vessel their permanent residence, so they sell everything and move into their floating home. One dream that I hear about often, and has always intrigued me, is the dream of building a mothership. I recently had the pleasure of working with husband-and-wife team Mark and Truitt, a Bahamian couple that had enough of the dreaming phase and decided to actually build their dream mothership! A gorgeous 58E Marlow Explorer they named “Lucky Dog”

For those who may not know what it is, a mothership is a vessel that serves as a temporary home on the water. In their case, Mark and Truitt wanted to build a vessel they could come back to after a long day of fishing or diving or snorkeling, etc. A comfortable boat where they could host family and friends whether they were anchored out or tied up at a slip. They wanted to build a floating space that felt like home on the water. Their plan was to build a vessel that not only had all the comforts of home on the interior but that also had everything they needed on the exterior for lounging around, dining al fresco, covered seating, and all the hardware necessary to keep their center consoles safely tied up to “Lucky Dog”

*I wanted to get a first-hand thought process and experience from Mark and Truitt themselves, so I asked them a few questions to better understand what went into making their dream a reality...*

Marlow with them. Truitt and I were on the same page (a must since we are the co-captain and crew), and after much deliberation and nights exploring videos on the internet, we decided to build a 58E Marlow.

## Why did you choose to go with Marlow?

We did not want a sportfish. We enjoyed our trawler and always liked the idea of a “mothership.” We are very active on our boating trips. We like to spend the days fishing, diving, and beaching, which we use our tender for. Having a good understanding of how we wanted to utilize our “big boat” we narrowed the search down to about 3 builders of “fast trawlers.” We were impressed with the build quality, the aesthetic appeal, the headroom in the engine room, and overall good use of space that Marlow offers. We also liked the twin keel design with the props above the keels. We spend a lot of time in waters less than 6’ deep, with sandy bottom, so we wanted to be able to rub a little paint off the keels (occasionally) without damaging anything. In the end, after speaking with you (Rod) and Joe, and consulting with our friends as previous owners, we decided to begin the process of building our dream!

## What would you say were the 5 most important features to consider when building your mothership?

Come on Rod, just 5 features? Speaking strictly from our experience in the Bahamas, as a couple that operate and maintain the vessel, this is what we prioritized:

## Was this something you planned for a long time? How did you land on the idea?

Prior to building our 58E Marlow “Lucky Dog”, we owned a 55’ trawler style boat for 12 years. Our family enjoyed these years exploring the northern and central Bahamas, with our favorite destination being the Exumas. This was often weekend trips and maybe an annual trip for 7 to 10 days. In 2021 our children were in college in the U.S., and likely to stay in the U.S. to begin their careers. Covid also impacted the Bahamas to a greater degree than most of the U.S. Lockdowns were common, and some lasted for a month or more. This gave us a lot of time to plan our moves and educate ourselves. Truitt and I started talking about exploring more of the Bahamas, with longer trips, more frequent trips. This would require reliability and high quality. We had looked at Marlow for maybe 10 years at boat shows in Florida. We also have close friends who owned a 53 Marlow and then a 66 Marlow (which they built) so we had the benefit of their experiences as well as opportunities to enjoy their

**1** A Yacht Controller. If you are operating a 70 LOA vessel, with a tender tied to the side, while squeezing into a 72’ slip, all while tying the lines and setting out fenders, and you wish to stay married, get the Yacht Controller.

**2** The semi-enclosed bridge with A/C is a must for us. It’s hot in the Bahamas. We went with glass on three sides and the back closed by vinyl. A/C takes the bite out of the hot days when we go on longer 10-knot cruises.

**3** Power to pull our tender and get going fast when needed. We went with the larger Cat C-18, 1150hp. This allows us the ability to pull our tender at 18-19 knots comfortably at 70-72% engine load with no issues in terms of engine and transmission temperatures.

**4** A capable tender. We cannot boat without a usable tender. We pull a 23' Albury brothers or our 29' SeaVee. If you want to run around the islands and through the cuts and have some range to travel fishing, a 13' inflatable will not do it. This is not negotiable for us. Imagine using the "Mothership" every day to fish and beach, packing up the galley and going out in 2-4' seas to get salt water, bait and fish blood everywhere. Everyone on board now has to go fishing when you run a sportsfish and everyone has to clean the fish blood and salt off the sportsfish when back at the dock. Then you can start the process of putting your shades back up and getting the "house" back in order. We leave all the dirty work to the tender. We also have a modified 15' dragonfly flats boat that we keep on the upper deck for shorter trips, when we don't feel like pulling a larger tender.

**5** Water maker - this is a must for the Bahamas. We go through a lot of water washing the "Lucky dog" on arrival to our destination, and then to support the tender(s), laundry, showers etc. We can easily use 150 gallons per day and when rinsing the boats and gear down, 400 gallons a day or more.

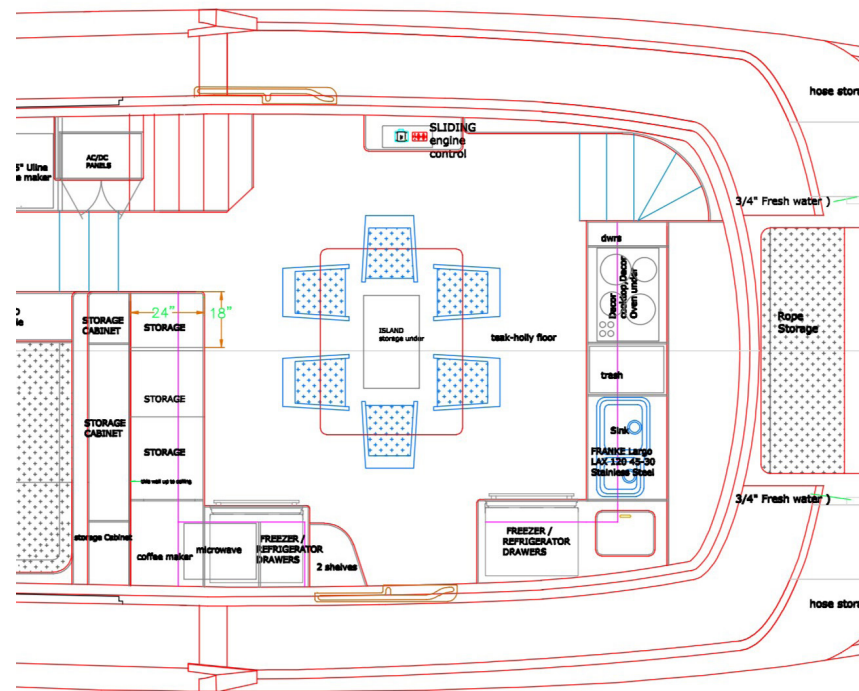
**6** Full size, front load washer and dryer. Truitt will tell you this is also not negotiable.

**7** Shade - We have shade that extends over our cockpit, transom and swim platform. This keeps the back of the boat. We tie the tender alongside aft or across the swim platform. We also have full shade for the upper deck where we grill and enjoy the views. Don't forget window shades (galley fwd and bridge fwd). If I am going to be stationary for a few days we will put a bridge forward windshield on.

**8** "Mud room" access through the boat. We enter from the swim platform most often. We have a passage from the transom door, through the lazarette, the engine room and into the stateroom/shower. Your Salon will thank you.

*"Keep it as simple as possible, where possible. Emphasize functionality, durability and reliability. Stay away from push buttons and boats that integrate everything with your ipad and touch screens."*

**9** Full size galley, with comfortable seating for 6, and all the functionality of home. With a semi-enclosed air-conditioned bridge, we find the lower helm to be a waste of living space.



**10** Storage - We keep the boat "ready to go" so we use the Beach Club/Lazarette as a garage for fishing rods, tackle, tools, freezers, coolers, buckets, cleaning knives etc. The bathroom and sink is good there for washing up as well. Marlow built us a large storage box on the swim platform, where we can keep wet items such as snorkeling gear, more buckets, cleaning supplies etc. We utilize this always and have a duplicate box on the upper deck for supplies for our tender.

**11** Stay away from extra bells and whistles. Keep it as simple as possible, where possible. Emphasize functionality, durability and reliability. Stay away from push buttons and boats that integrate everything with your ipad and touch screens.

**12** Good anchor (with a spare mounted on the pulpit), with chain rode. We use the Ultra Anchor as our main. We also use Active Captain (Garmin/Navionics) with the ipad to monitor our helm and anchor drag alarm from our stateroom.

**13** Forward and aft shore power cords. If you wish to tie a tender to the rear, oftentimes you will have to pull in to slips "bow first". This is also good to have the spare power sources in case you fry a connector or drop one overboard. Redundancy is key.

**14** Starlink/internet access - We have a Aegean router with 3 sources of internet: Wifi Booster that we use when at or near a marina, Cellular data, which we can use when within 15-20 miles of a cell tower (or more) and Starlink, which is our primary source and can be used anywhere. This has changed the way we can use our boat, particularly in terms of the duration. We just completed a 3-week trip into the southern Bahamas and were connected to our business (when needed) the whole time.

**15** Big fenders - If you are going to tie your tender and other toys alongside, make sure you have good quality fenders. We use 18" diameter x 42" long in most cases. We just got 2 x 24" diameter fenders for tying our 29' SeaVee alongside when under way, at 8 knots. We do this when entering certain marinas and mooring sites, with just Truitt and I onboard.

**16** Make sure you have good wash-down faucets on the upper deck, main deck forward and aft. Dragging a 75' - 100' hose around can be a pain. If it's hard to rinse the boat down at the end of a long day, you may be tempted to skip it.



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## What was/were your goal(s) when you set out to build this vessel?

We wanted to shift gears a bit. We are not retired and run our own businesses, but we wanted to begin a transition of spending a bit more time away in an environment that we enjoy. We like to travel but don't always like the airports and crowds. Let's face it, travel and even the destinations are not what they used to be. We enjoy the active times and peaceful solitude of the boat. It's a lifestyle. Even the repairs and maintenance become a part of that lifestyle. Boating can be hard work but the rewards are worth it. We wanted a boat that had reliability, build quality, and design features with the right amenities to allow us to rest well at the end of a long day in the sun, sand and sea.

## Now that you've had it for a few months and put it to the test, was it built to your satisfaction or is there something lacking?

We have been very happy with the build quality of Marlow. We have had "Lucky Dog" for about 18 months now, and she has about 370 hrs on her. She would have considerably more hours on the engines if she were used for trolling and fishing. She has been back for her first annual service and warranty work and while there were many items on the list, they were generally small things. All large mechanical items such as A/C, generators, and engines have performed well. Where we have had minor issues, Joe, Stephen, Doug and the team at Marlow have been good about taking care of us. We love the layout and functionality of the boat.

## What would you do differently if you were to do it all over again?

I would install larger generators. We have 2 x 16Kw Kohlers. We can run most house items with no issues on one, but when you need to run the water maker, cook, and run the air conditioner etc, you will need a 21Kw or 24Kw. We can run both if needed and split the load so it's not an issue but for true/full redundancy, I would go larger.

## How/where do you typically cruise your Marlow?

Most of our trips are 3-5 nights, to the Exumas, with some longer periods and further destinations in the Bahamas thrown in as time allows. Our goal is to



be right for you. Reliability, redundancy, functionality, durability, and simplicity should be paramount. Avoid that extra gadget somewhere that you will never use.

Talk to other boat owners that own the style of boat or do the type of cruising you want to do. When you talk to other boat owners, consider who you are talking to. Does this guy rebuild his own engines underway, or does he have a similar skill set and expectations that you do? I have spoken to boat owners that bought a large boat and sold quickly because they did not have reasonable expectations or the interest in learning about the mechanical aspects and maintenance of the boat. If you intend for you and your spouse to manage and run a boat like this, make sure you are somewhat capable and don't mind getting your hands dirty on occasion. For example, if you don't know where the air conditioner filters are in your house, don't get a "mothership".

Having a boat like this, using it frequently and maintaining it is time consuming. Make sure you are ready for that. It's a lifestyle. Planning trips while watching the weather, wind direction, wind speed, and moon phases (for fishing of course) become a part of that lifestyle. We call it "necessary distractions" from the other things we do.

When you are done with that, talk to Rod Silva! We could not have done the build without him.

use the boat once per month (or more). Our favorite destination is about 50 miles away from home. We run at 10 knots when the weather is really nice and we are in no hurry but we can cruise very comfortably at 20-21 knots as needed. "Lucky Dog" is kept at our home dock so we also spend time on her when at the dock. We plan to visit Florida annually for service work and have used that time to see places along the way that we would not do otherwise.

## What are your plans for cruising your mothership for the future?

More of the same. We love boating in the Bahamas. We love the Exumas and want to spend more time exploring the southern Bahamas. With so many islands, and beautiful anchorages, I don't think we will run out of destinations soon. If you have not seen Conception Island, Bahamas, it should be on your bucket list.

## What suggestions do you have for someone looking to do this?

Go to boat shows. Tour the boats you are interested in. A good understanding of how you want to use the boat will help to evaluate which brand or model will



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What an experience! After helping them build their dream mothership and keeping in touch with them on an almost weekly basis, I have learned more and more about their boating lifestyle. It might not be for everyone. But for Mark and Truitt, building a vessel where they can work, enjoy the company of friends and families, go on long range cruising, and explore the Bahamian waters has truly been a dream come true.

Congratulations to them. Wishing them many many more years of health and calm seas as they continue making memories on their adventures aboard their mothership "Lucky Dog". Cheers!